

Prayer

Release us, Lord Jesus, from all worldly bonds which hold us tight, and liberate us into the light of Your Kingdom. Open our eyes to see that even in this world, something of Your majesty may be seen, may be heard, may be touched, may be felt, and may be known. Then, empowered by this revelation, may we live as liberated people! Thanks be to God, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: World Politics

At the end of a week of prayer about the politics of the world, pray and ask the Lord to guide good and godly people into the political life of our nations. The world needs leaders who can hear the voice of God and understand the signs of the times; and also fight with good honest argument to win the highest offices of each land. May we be blessed by such people.

Meditation

It is wonderful to know the Lord's healing touch:
Through confession of sin both to Him and others;
And at just the right time for blessing and peace;
He may act before a problem or a need is known!

He heals, though His favour can never be earned:
For when in despair, and we turn and reach out;
He uses our friends and His servants who care;
And He will break down the evil that holds us fast.

He heals us naturally, and sometimes miraculously!
The spirit is cleansed by His holiness and love;
He restores every part of our bodies in sleep;
And surprises the soul by the power of miracles!

Bible Study - Hebrews 12:7-11

⁷ Stand firm as a matter of discipline; God deals with you like children, for what child is not disciplined by a father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined, as all else have been, then you are not true children but illegitimate. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human parents to discipline us and we respected them. Should we not therefore be willing to submit to the Father of our spirits and live? ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a limited time period as seemed best to them; but the Father does this for our benefit, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ Discipline feels difficult rather than enjoyable at the time, but it results in a harmonious harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

Review

The subject of discipline is not straightforward, but this passage is one of the clearest statements about discipline within the entire Bible. In general, it relies considerably on the idea of wisdom in the Old Testament, in particular, the first nine chapters of Proverbs; but it does not make any direct quotes. Rather, the author prefers to make a direct appeal to us to accept that discipline is essential for all successful relationships; and the primary relationship he is concerned with is our relationship with God, through Christ. Whilst faith is the first key to our relationship with God (see chapter 11), the second key feature is discipline (12:7,8). However, we must understand one thing, which is that in this text, 'discipline' does not mean 'punishment'.

So what does 'discipline' mean? To begin with, it is important for us to know that although the word 'discipline' in English is very similar to the word 'disciple', the two words are very different in New Testament Greek. Put as simply as possible, the Greek word 'disciple' means 'one who follows', but the Greek word for 'discipline' means 'instruction or learning'. Unfortunately, this is all

rather confusing, but it would be possible to translate this whole passage from Hebrews using words related to 'learning' or 'taught' instead of 'disciple'; for example; verses 7 and 8 could read;

'Stand firm on the grounds of what you have learned; God deals with you like children, for what child is not taught by a father? If you have not been taught, as all else have been, then you are not true children but illegitimate ...'

I leave you to read the rest of the passage in the same way, but the reason I have kept with the word 'discipline' is because it still conveys the idea of learning the essentials of something. In ancient times children were not taught in schools but by their parents, and in particular, boys were taught, or 'disciplined' by their fathers when they grew into teenage years. It is a very different picture to life today! Nowadays the word 'discipline' is still part of education; for example, each subject taught at school or university has its 'disciplines', and you cannot learn anything about that subject unless you accept and use those disciplines; if you learn music you must learn the disciplines of practicing scales, if you learn an ancient language you must 'parse' verbs, if you learn physics you must use mathematics. The list goes on.

Our reading today challenges us because it tells us that after faith, the next most important thing in our relationship with the Lord is to learn and be disciplined by Him. He may wish to teach us how to manage our lives, or to be sensitive to the spirit; or He may wish us to learn all about His Word, the Bible; or learn how to pray. All of these are 'disciplines' of learning, and Hebrews tells us that we must accept the Lord's discipline (12:8), which does not mean we must accept being punished if we do not do what He says! It also says that if we respect our earthly teachers (sometimes our fathers) who have taught us what we know, then we should learn to respect our Lord who teaches us the truths of life (12:9). Hebrews also reminds us that earthly fathers or teachers can only help us for a short period of time, but the Lord always leads us on and teaches us more. Indeed, that is the path of true holiness (12:10)!

Lastly, verse 11 is sometimes translated as if the issue is corporal punishment (which it is not!); some Bible versions say 'discipline is painful for a time but yields a harvest ...' (12:11), and it is unfortunately true that this has been used in past generations to justify physical punishment of children in schools. The problem here is not with the Bible but with the ignorance with which we have used it. The Lord longs for His people to have a godly rather than an earthly understanding of His Word, which here means no more than that the discipline of learning can be hard work, but is worth it. Spiritually, the hard work of doing what our Lord asks for yields a fruit for the Kingdom of God, and there is nothing here to make us ashamed or fearful, even if God has to work us hard to achieve the results He requires!

In conclusion, few Christians think of learning as the second most important feature of our relationship with God after faith; but if you think of our ignorance compared with God's wisdom, then it is obviously important that we learn from Him. That is what Hebrews says.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How is the word 'discipline' used today negatively? How is the word 'discipline' used positively? How does this help us with this text?
2. Hebrews says that if we will not be disciplined by the Lord, we are 'illegitimate' Discuss this.
3. How can 'discipline' be part of the path of holiness? (12:10)

Discipleship

Read through the entire passage and insert the words 'teaching' or 'learning' or their cognates instead of 'discipline', and consider carefully what the passage says to you. You may well find that it challenges you to consider learning more about your faith in some way, so make a note of this and decide to follow it through. There is no point in coming to terms with Scripture and not acting upon what God has said to us!

Final Prayer

O Lord, when people all around us reject the Christian faith, give us the presence of mind to stand firm in You. Your hand is our guide, Your Spirit is our strength and Your love is our comfort. If we remain in Your presence, then no-one can take this away from us. AMEN